

Fiscal Highlights

Pew Final Key Findings - Gary R. Syphus

After several months of research, the Pew Charitable Trusts' Public Safety Performance Project presented their final key findings on October 9th to the Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice (CCJJ). Based on the Pew findings, CCJJ organized three subgroups (1) Sentencing, (2) Release, and (3) Treatment and Supervision, to respond and make recommendations that will likely have both policy and budget implications if implemented. They refer to the [MGT study](#) and estimate that by averting prison population growth, the state could avoid costs of about \$542 million over the next 20 years (about \$27 million on average per year).

Some of the key PEW findings were:

1. While the incarceration rate in Utah remains below the national average, Utah's prison population increased by 22% over the last 10 years and is projected to grow another 37% in the next 20 years.
2. Nonviolent 2nd and 3rd degree offenders are driving prison growth with more admissions and longer time served.
3. About 46% of prison population is made up of people revoked from prison.

Below are 10 of the 21 recommendations the three subgroups recommended:

1. Reclassifying simple drug possession offenses as a class A misdemeanors; and commercial drug offenses as 3rd degree felonies.
2. Lowering sentencing guidelines for certain lower level crimes.
3. Establish maximum guidelines specific for technical violations.
4. Establishing time credits for fulfilling certain programming requirements.
5. Establishing a graduated sanctions for revocations.
6. Improving transition from prison to supervision process through greater coordination and creating new positions specifically dealing with transition.
7. Eliminate GED requirement in order to be released, assuming they have met all other conditions for release.
8. Further study on aging/mentally ill and develop policies.
9. Ensure treatment adheres to evidence-based methods.
10. Establishing specific standards for treatment in county jails.

As background, in February of 2014, state leaders requested that the Pew Charitable Trusts' Public Safety Performance Project "conduct research and analysis of Utah's sentencing and corrections system, develop inmate population impact statements for use in our state's forthcoming decisions regarding the potential relocation of the Utah State Prison in Draper, and explore policy options that would hold offenders accountable, improve public safety, and contain corrections costs."